

Message Text

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42

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

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FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4592

INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

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CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, SF

SUBJECT: LABOR DISPUTE AT HEINEMANN ELECTRIC

REF: JOHANNESBURG 0431

1. ACCORDING TO MANAGER HEINEMANN ELECTRIC, ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF BLACK EMPLOYEES HAVE RETURNED TO WORK AT PLANT AS OF APRIL 6. HE HAS SUPPLEMENTED THESE BY HIRING ABOUT 150 NEW BLACK EMPLOYEES, AND PRODUCTION IS NOW AT ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF FORMER LEVEL OWING TO LACK OF SKILLS ON PART OF NEW EMPLOYEES. MANAGER SAYS HE IS HOLDING OFF HIRING MORE NEW EMPLOYEES UNTIL APRIL 9 TO AFFORD FORMER EMPLOYEES CHANCE TO RECLAIM JOBS. HE EXPECTS PRODUCTION TO BE NEARLY NORMAL BY APRIL 12. MEANWHILE, UNION SAYS IT STILL HOLDING OUT FOR RECOGNITION BUT CONCEDES THAT EMPLOYEES ARE RETURNING TO WORK. THEY ALSO SAY THEY PLAN COURT CASE AGAINST POLICE FOR INJURIES SUSTAINED DURING VIOLENCE LAST WEEK (REFTEL). IN RELATED MATTER, RAND DAILY MAIL REPORTED PROMINENTLY ON MEETING BETWEEN UNION OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS AND LABOR OFFICER AT CONSULATE JOHANNESBURG. HEADLINE READS "US IS UNLIKELY TO ACT ON
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STRIKE FIRM", AND LABOR OFFICER IS QUOTED AS STATING THAT "US

'SUPPORTS THE IDEA OF BLACK UNIONS.'"

2. IN LONG INTERVIEW WITH CONSULATE LABOR OFFICER, MR. W.E. WILCKENS, MANAGER OF THE HEINEMANN ELECTRIC COMPANY PLANT HERE, CONFIRMED FACT THAT 30 PERCENT OF COMPANY STOCK WAS IN HANDS OF AMERICAN COMPANY OF SAME NAME BUT THAT REMAINDER OF STOCK HELD BY SOUTH AFRICAN FIRM OF BARLOW-RAND. HE STATED THAT WORKERS BEGINNING TO RETURN TO WORK AND RELATED A HISTORY OF EVENTS THAT FACTUALLY AGREES WITH DEVELOPMENTS AS ALREADY REPORTED BUT WHOSE INTERPRETATION IS SEEN, NOT SURPRISINGLY, IN A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT LIGHT. WILCKENS SAYS WORKERS WERE GIVEN SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO VOTE FOR LIAISON COMMITTEE, WERE TOLD COMPANY HAD NO OBJECTION TO MEMBERSHIP IN UNION AND THAT, INDEED, IF WORKERS WISHED VOTE UNION SHOP STEWARDS INTO THE LIAISON COMMITTEE, COMPANY WOULD DEAL WITH THEM COMPANY HAD MET WITH REPRESENTATIVEXS OF UNION ON FEBRUARY 20, BUT HAD TOLD UNION REPS THAT IT WOULD NOT AGREE TO DEAL WITH UNION REPS UNLESS THEY WERE ALSO EMPLOYEES OF COMPANY. WILCKENS SAYS COMPANY HAD DELAYED DISMISSAL OF CERTAIN EMPLOYEES WHO HAD BECOME REDUNDANT FOR OVER A MONTH BECAUSE OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES OVER UNION ISSUE, BUT HAD FINALLY DECIDED TO LET THEM GO WHEN THESE NEGOTIATIONS REACHED AN IMPASSE. EVENTS THEN PROCEEDED AS PREVIOUSLY DESCRIBED, EXCEPT THAT COMPANY ORIGINALLY CALLED IN POLICE TO PROTECT PAYROLL AND TO PREVENT INTIMIDATION OF WORKERS. WILCKENS SAID HE REGRETTEDEEPLY THAT VIOLENCE HAD RESULTED, BUT INSISTED POLICE COULD NOT BE BLAMED AS WORKERS OUTSIDE PLANT GATES REFUSED TO DISPERSE WHEN CALLED UPON TO DO SO.

3. CONSULATE LABOR OFFICER WENT TO MEETING ON APRIL 6 WHICH HE UNDERSTOOD WOULD BE WITH A FEW UNION OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS EVENTS. IN POINT OF FACT, SOME 25 UNION REPRESENTATIVES WERE PRESENT ALONG WITH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE SOUTH AFRICANELECTRICAL WORKERS FEDERATION (WHITE). AFTER MEETING GOT UNDERWAY, HE LEARNED THAT LABOR EDITOR OF MAIL WAS ALSO PRESENT. MEETING BEGAN WITH RESUME BY LOCAL UNION SECRETARY OF EVENTS WHICH INTER ALIA STRESSED UNPROVOKED NATURE OF POLICE ATTACKS.

4. UNION REPS THEN BEGAN TO QUESTION LABOR OFFICER AS TO WHAT USG MIGHT BE WILLING TO DO TO SUPPORT CAUSE OF BLACK TRADE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNIONISM IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHAT PRESSURE EMBASSY OR USG COULD BRING TO BEAR UPON AMERICAN COMPANIES TO FORCE RECOGNITION OF BLACK TRADE UNIONS, HOW USG MIGHT PRESSURE AMERICAN COMPANIES TO CONFORM TO GUIDELINES ISSUED BY STATE DEPT IN 1973, WHETHER THE US WOULD PUBLICLY ANNOUNCE ITS SUPPORT FOR BLACK UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA, ETC.LABOR OFFICER POINTED OUT THAT WHILE US SUPPORTED DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNIONS REGARDLESS OF THE COLOR OF THEIR MEMBERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, IT HAD NO MEANS

WHATSOEVER OF COERCING AMERICAN FIRMS INTO OBEDIENCE TO STRICT SET OF CRITERIA AND, UNDER A FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM SUCH AS OURS, FIRMS ULTIMATELY HAD TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS IN THESE MATTERS. LABOR OFFICER ALSO POINTED OUT THAT ANY ATTEMPT BY USG TO INTERFERE DIRECTLY IN DISPUTE AT HEINEMANN WOULD BE REGARDED AS INTERFERENCE IN THE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS OF SOUTH AFRICA.

5. DAILY MAIL COVERAGE OF STORY, WHILE PROMINENT ESPECIALLY IN EDITION PUBLISHED PRIMARILY FOR BLACKS, WAS REASONABLY ACCURATE AND ONLY STATEMENT (NOT IN QUOTES) THAT WAS REALLY INACCURATE AND INCOMPLETE WAS LEAD SENTENCE WHICH STATED THAT "UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK TRADE UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA."
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